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12 August, 1999

Jane Henney, M.D.
Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

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Dear Dr. Henney,

I just finished reading an article from the August, 1999 issue of *Vegetarian Times*. The article is entitled "Fresh From The Lab" and the topic is about genetically engineered foods. I must say that the argument in favor of genetically engineering disease / pest resistant crops is very promising for our future. However, the issue that I am concerned with is the Food and Drug Administration's 1992 ruling that food from genetically engineered plants is no different from traditionally produced food and thus not subject to regulations regarding food additives.

As a mother of three young children, I am extremely concerned with the future condition of the world that they will inherit. I continually strive to give them the most nutritious foods that I can find through the local food co-op, major grocery store chains and local farmers' markets. Until reading this article, I was trusting the labeling of products that is required by the FDA, knowing that I could read the label and base my buying decisions on the ingredients each product contained. I was also trusting that when I purchased a produce item that was labeled "organic", I was getting a product that was produced in a manner consistent with the ideals set forth to preserve human health as well as environmental health.

It is extremely disturbing to me that the FDA, an organization established to ensure the safety of the products that corporations want people to ingest, would think that it is OK to not require labeling of genetically engineered produce and products containing them. The corporations that stand to profit from the sale of these engineered products do not have any incentive to let consumers know that the products are transgenic. Why is that? Are they afraid that consumers will not purchase the "food of the future" if they know that it has been genetically altered? The USDA proposed allowing transgenic foods to be labeled as organic in an effort to open up another potential consumer base. Can this action be considered a conflict of interest since the USDA is responsible for creating consumer demand for the products that they also inspect and oversee? It would seem that their incentive lies in creating profits, not protecting the health of Americans. After all, via public school nutritional education programs over the last 25 years, they are partly responsible for creating the eating habits of today's consumers who are experiencing obesity, heart disease and cancers.

I am not writing to you to say that I am against transgenic food products. What I am against is not properly labeling these products and thus leaving the public unaware of what they may be ingesting. As a consumer, I have a right to make an informed decision about the products that I purchase, especially those items that affect (both positively and negatively) the health of my family. By allowing products to reach consumers without truthful labeling, corporations, the USDA and the FDA are deceiving the public and preventing them from making informed purchasing decisions.

It is my hope that the FDA will do right by the health of future generations and continue to be the watchdog for the safety of foods and products that the public ingests and consumes. Please do not allow any genetically engineered foods, or products made with them, to reach my grocery store shelves without having a label stating that they are genetically engineered! And PLEASE do not let the USDA get away with labeling them as "organic"! It is already hard enough to find dependable sources of healthful foods without tainting the organic marketplace with unlabeled transgenic produce and food products!

I would appreciate any information you might have regarding the status of this issue and steps that I may take in helping the effort to establish labeling requirements for transgenic food products. Please feel free to contact me via e-mail, phone or address. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jody Gordon
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